
Globalisation and Its Influences on Higher Education Policy in China

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Abstract:

In this day and age, there are still plenty of discussions on globalisation: for some it might be seen as a positive whilst others are more pessimistic. In general, all opinions describe the growing contemporary global interconnectedness. The society that mankind will inhabit in the near future is being shaped by new and powerful forces that include the globalisation of economic activity, the growing importance of knowledge as a prerequisite for participation in fundamental human activities and the increasing democratisation of political systems (UNESCO, 1997). Education, in general, and higher education, in particular, has been an important factor in laying the foundations for such an evolution of society. More education policies are needed to meet the needs and challenges. This paper aims to discuss both globalisation and its effects on education policy making. Initially, the notions and understandings of globalisation would be reviewed in chronological order. Following, the main concerns of globalisation, namely, in political, economic and cultural aspects will be discussed respectively. Obviously, when considering these parts, globalisation implies influences to education, education organisations and education policy making. It leads to the third section: discussion on how globalisation has affected the production and development of contemporary education policy in general. Finally, in view of a globalisation tendency, the study will be narrowed down to a particular branch—expansion policy in higher education, and within in a specific nation—China, in order to present exactly what the influence is.

Key Words: Globalisation of Politics, Globalisation of Economy, Globalisation of Culture, Higher Education Policy, China

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there is little doubt of the existence of globalisation, yet there is no agreement on what globalisation exactly is. Whilst some believe globalisation equals to freedom, others define it as a prison; when some consider it as prosperity, others insist it brings poverty and inequality (Schirato & Webb, 2003). In contrast to globalisation which is still in suspense, another theme in this essay—"education policy" has been produced and developed. Anderson (1979) argued that policy is the "authoritative allocation of values" (cited in Lingard & Ozga, 2007, p.220). In the education field, "policy" includes all sectors; the policies in Chinese higher education have experienced long-term and circuitous processes of production and development due to historical influences, as well as contemporary cooperation and competitions. In present-day China, there are more cross-border interactions in politics, economy and culture; the globalised intervention seems more vital for regional and national policy making.

A helpful approach to studying education policy suggests that it is essential to analyse context, texts and consequences of the policy (Taylor *et al.*, 1997). In the information era, when researching the context of influences of education policymaking, it requires us to take the global factors into account, though we cannot deny that the local factors may have immediate effects on policy practice. Consideration of global factors requires a broad understanding of the phenomenon of globalisation (Lingard & Ozga, 2007, p.2-3), that is the reason why the general discussion of globalisation is unavoidable.

2. NOTIONS OF GLOBALISATION

Whilst some believe that the emergence of globalisation can be traced back to the Industrial Revolution era, others insist it only emerged in the past several decades (Schirato & Webb, 2003). Just as there is no consensus on the origin of globalisation, the understanding of the notion differs from man to man and changes with the times, both in general aspects and or in academic areas. It wasn't until the 1990s that the term "globalisation" was widely discussed in policy and academic circles. In 1997, Hutton stressed that globalisation is characterised by the homogenisation of economy and culture; it shaped a more homogeneous community in a number of ways, eroded cultures and imposed a worldwide economic and political system. Therefore, globalisation is a challenge of divergent histories and cultures, and traditional lifestyles. Mulgan (1998) argued that globalisation means the increased connectedness within the globe; it opens up more opportunities wherever people are. Wiseman (1998) highlighted that globalisation is more than a term for unregulated capitalism; it cannot be applied too readily to explain any international phenomenon, so a more accurate word should be expounded. Scholte (2000, p.16-17) outlined five concepts of globalisation at the beginning of the 21st century: 1) *Internationalisation*. The term describes the cross-border connection between countries and the increased international exchange. Hirst and Thompson (1996) have identified globalisation as growing international trade and capital investment. 2) *Liberalisation*.

It treats globalisation as a process of wiping restrictions in order to create a borderless economic world. 3) *Universalisation*. It means globalisation is the process that spreads objects and experiences to citizens all around the world. 4) *Westernisation* or *modernisation*, especially “*Americanisation*”. Giddens (1990) emphasized that globalisation equals the ascending tendency of the global power of America to a certain extent. 5) *Respatialisation*. Authors highlight the increase of “supraterritoriality in contemporary globalisation”. Since each of these five notions identifies globalisation in different ways, there is no criterion to judge the right and wrong definition. In the same year, Beynon and Dunkerley pointed out a number of forms of globalisation, which included the technological compression of time and space; the spread of democracy, human rights and cross-cultural understanding; a new phase of Western capitalism; an “imposition of Americanized culture”; “electronic imperialism”; production of and access to information; concentration of ownership of international media production; and transmission in the hands of a few corporations. September 11 brought long-term implications to globalisation; new discursive fields of social change, new realities of global democracy and justice should be considered in more normative terms (Rizvi, 2004). In 2001, Waters stated that globalisation was not only an economic force which guided the worldwide expansion of economic relations and international markets, but also a cultural phenomenon which was no longer contained under the control of nation states. He believed ideas, attitudes, knowledge, cultural commodities and so on would spread around the world because of globalisation. In 2004, Held summarised four distinctive features or concepts of globalisation: stretched social relations, intensification of flows, increasing interpenetration, and global infrastructure. In 2007, Robertson *et al.* summarised all of the previous discussions about the notions of globalisation, which in some context, is the newest and most full-scale understanding of the globalised process: 1) it is the economic deregulation and the development of global financial markets; 2) it relates to technological changes and product innovation, as well as the emergence of a new production method; 3) it implies the development of ‘free’ markets which applies the classical economic theory; 4) it imports the information revolution which impacts on communications media; 5) it reduces the cost and time in moving commodities and transportation of people. With regard to the future, many authorities believe globalisation will signal the end of national divisions in respect of political and economic actions, as well as the reproduction and consumption in cultural areas, resulting in the self-contained states becoming problematic (Lingard & Ozga, 2007).

There are always some people who hold the opposite opinion of globalisation. They point out that environmental and health problems will result from global environmental change; the cultural homogenisation which accompanies globalisation will destroy local cultures; the increasing cross-nation communication will develop new international diseases; financial meltdowns will aggravate social conflicts and their devastating outcomes will affect particular places; the destruction of local economies will be widespread especially in the developing world; the hugely insecure will proliferate and more “wild zones” will emerge (Scott, 1998, p.13). Indeed, globalisation produces dislocations that can damage citizens, spread illness,

contribute to conflict, even threaten our existence. Globalisation is neither all good as proponents argue, nor all bad as opponents assert (Sobel, 2009).

Currently, neo-liberalism which is also known as the Washington Consensus, which attempts to provide a coherent and comprehensive framework for social and economic policy, now also provides an ideological framework for international organisations. The Washington Consensus dominates debates, and it has a profound effect not only on developing nations but on the nature and form of education as well.

3. GENERAL CONCERNS AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Globalisation has been linked to almost every social aspect from the rise of knowledge economy, the declining authority of the nation and the decrease of traditional cultural practices, to the advent of neo-liberal economic regimes and the emergence of a postmodern consumer culture. There is no doubt that globalisation is a thoroughly contested subject (Lingard & Ozga, 2007). Held (2004) agreed that globalisation is a multi-dimensional process and it applies to the every social relation. Thus three main concerns of globalisation are picked out and discussed.

3.1 Globalisation of Politics

Globalisation is understood as blurring distinctions between the international and the national, the global and the local and in so doing affects a new spatiality to politics (Ozga & Lingard, 2007). In Waters' (2001, p.94-122) arguments, globalisation implies that social structure cannot be predicted on the basis of geographical location, meanwhile, globalisation implies relationships across great distances of space; though the development is phasic, a globalised political system would encompass a system of global governance. When talking about governance, it means a globalised process of coordination in politics. Among governments and international and transnational agencies, there are tasks of developing global or transnational rules and policies, or managing trans-border issues, aiming to realise common aims or collective goals. Currently, global networks of policy governance in education are already being built: On the national level, the education system such as the National Education Department has become a manager rather than a producer; international organisations such as UNESCO and OECD have formulated and executed education policy.

The relationships among globalisation, politics and education are complex. In 1995, Carter and O'Neill summarised "the new orthodoxy" which aims to change the relationships between politics, government and education in complex westernised post-industrialised countries. The main elements in this orthodoxy are: 1) tightening the connection between schooling, employment, productivity and trade, in order to improve national economics; 2) enhancing students' employment-related skills and competencies; 3) controlling more directly curriculum content and assessment; 4) reducing the costs to government of education; 5) increasing education input by involving school decision making and pressure of market choice (cited in

Ball, 1998). It meets the requirements of globalisation and acts as a typical example of remodelling education policy as well.

3.2 Globalisation of Economy

The advent of the information society, scientific and technical civilisation, and the globalisation of the economy are the three causes of globalisation contributing to the development of a learning society (Spring, 2009). Globalisation of economy refers to the international integration of economies and systems of communication. It involves the increasingly international nature of markets, capital and labour, and the production and distribution of goods and services (Porter & Vidovich, 2000). The globalisation of the economy is one of the dimensions of the reconfiguration of the world. Boyer and Drache (1996, p.62) argued that globalisation is the result of the reorganisation of the economy and society which used to be classified into three worlds but now replaced by geo-economy of the planet, for example, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the European Union. The performance of economic globalisation displays five changes: growing international trade which results from lower trade barriers and more competition; increasing financial flows such as foreign direct investment and technology transfers; rising communications by both the Internet and traditional media; advancing technology in electronics, transportation, bioengineering and so on; and growing labour mobility.

Globalisation impacts education policy in terms of finding common economic interests, building knowledge economy, and augmenting education funding. Two types of ideological trends emerge to answer the global change and those challenges have been brought into economic area: *neo-Fordism* creates larger market flexibility by reducing the power of trade unions, the privatisation of public utilities and the welfare states, as well as the celebration of individualism. Another one, *post-Fordism* shapes the national economy through investment in main economic sectors and in the development of human capital (cited in Ball, 1998). This policy dualism, as Ball argued, is represented in contemporary education policies which “tie together individual, consumer choice in education markets with rhetoric and policies aimed at furthering national economic interests”. Furthermore, the Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD) and the World Bank stress that education should provide the entry requirements to participation in the knowledge economies. Education policies linked to knowledge economies constitute a central globalised education policy discourse of the current situation (Lingard & Ozga, 2007).

3.3 Globalisation of Culture

Global consciousness acts as a result of international movements of ideas, people and cultural products such as movies and fashion, so cultural globalisation has become necessity because of cross-boundary interactions and social affiliations. Cultural globalisation refers to the increasing cultural connections. It involves the paradoxical phenomenon that everyone's traditional values and beliefs are under threat from many different perspectives, and

increasingly push towards similarity and homogeneity as well (Porter & Vidovich, 2000). The positive globalists extol the virtues of cultural globalisation, for instance, increasing worldwide communication makes the multiplicity of voices heard; the pessimistic globalists, on the other hand, focus on growing inequalities and the unaccountable and increasing power of the global media corporations (Held, 2004). Under the influence of globalisation, the cultural systems are more contested at an ever-increasing rate, and the diversity of cultural products and technologies are producing and developing more speedily than ever before. The future is uncertain, cultural globalisation would reflect globalisation and affect it in technology and education.

Obviously, globalisation does not only impact education policy through education's links to political and economic realities, but even more significantly cultural globalisation has brought greater impact on policymaking and developing because education within a larger cultural field which includes media and globalised consumer culture (Lingard & Ozga, 2007). Thus it is not an exaggeration to say that cultural globalisation shapes the purpose of education policy, and reshapes its aims to cope with the trend.

After consideration of politics, economy and culture, the affluence globalisation brings to education policy is evident. Globalisation forecasts future education, challenges the traditional capacity of education systems, and constructs national identities at the same time.

4. THE INFLUENCE OF GLOBALISATION ON EDUCATION POLICY

4.1 Policy Production and Development

In recent years, education policymakers and theorists have sought to understand both the ways in which global processes affect education and the actions in which education responds to it. Reviewing the studies on policy, two linkages have been addressed: firstly, the links between globalisation and educational restructuring. It fits the theorising of new state structures and a new managerialism; secondly, the linkage connects globalisation with a new education policy consensus. It focuses on the new human capital framing of education policy and creating supposedly a post-bureaucratic state educational system (Henry *et al.*, 2001, p.20)

The effects globalisation brings to the administrative structures of nation-states have made the production of education policy important for educators, thus the education policy frames at a higher level. Politicians have sought to re-assert control on the bureaucracy and the setting of policy agendas so new managerialism rose in response to the time and conditions. In the meanwhile, managerialism concentrates on achieving cross-nation policy coherence; an important factor in the human capital interpretation in the education field has become a significant element in national economic strategies. Education policies have been substantially affected by the new managerialism, also the public sector rebuilding in education centralises the setting of policies and develops the responsibility to reach goals both in national and regional political levels (Henry *et al.*, 2001). This administrative reform presents in different

ways in different countries depending on the history, political structures and culture elements, but wherever is it, no one can deny the effects that globalisation brings to education policy production and reform.

International organisations cannot be ignored in the processes of policy making; they help to meet requirements of globalisation, govern cross-country issues, and address challenges met by governments. International organisations such as the Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD); regional agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); and supranational political organisations such as the European Union, are all the result of globalisation. These organisations serve as instruments of governments or as forums for the exchange of ideas between governments. In the context of globalisation, they take on an enhanced policy role, contribute towards an emergent international policy community, promote the processes of global and domestic policy reform, explain to governments and the public what merits globalisation imports, and help governments to transmit policy messages to the public. When making policies, international organisations are implicated at three levels: as instruments of policy; as policy-making arenas; and as policy actors in their own right (Henry *et al.*, 2001).

4.2 Contemporary International Education Policies

Among the contemporary international education systems, there are various policy discourses in the field of higher education. Under the classification of Porter and Vidovich (2000), there are a number of common themes in the reactions of higher education policies to globalisation and its impact on changing at the institutional level. Firstly, there is a significant per capita government budget reduction in higher education; next, there has been a push to diversify incomes by increasing non-governmental resources, for instance, tuition fee increases, the recruitment of overseas students paying full fees, competition for research grants and centres, etc from the private departments; a commodification of knowledge as intellectual property has been experienced, especially with regard to connecting the intellectual work of universities with community, business and government interests; national governments have promoted the reorganisation of higher education in order to relate the higher education system more closely to national economic agendas; governments have established “quality” movements in higher education, in order to monitor the institutional processes and outcomes; still, concerns in social justice and equity issues in higher education have been evident and can be seen in expanding access to higher education; finally, there is still some debate regarding the nature and extent of autonomy of universities as institutions, and discussion around “culture wars”. This large group of similar themes in higher education policy to globalisation across states does suggest the issues can be interpreted in similar ways, however, within the tendency towards homogenisation of higher education policy, we cannot deny there are different responses between nations.

Within the globalisation tendency, the movement from elite to mass higher education and the internationalisation of higher education are outstanding issues. Most countries are now moving their focus towards expansion of higher education (Henry *et al.*, 2001). International

organisations are supporting the general move towards universal participation in higher education in a variety of events—conferences, thematic reviews, and through the Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE). The IMHE is interested in continuing education and lifelong learning, diversification the tertiary institutions, upgrading quality in mass higher education and so on. Hence, higher education can be redefined in order to meet the requirements of globalisation. In the meanwhile, mass higher education trains more qualified students, who are facilitating the process of globalisation. Together with universal provision, the internationalisation of higher education is in a marketised policy framework (Henry *et al.*, 2001). Within the global markets, there are more international students studying abroad in leading universities all around the world. It is the currents of globalisation that drive the overseas study tendency, so new international higher education policy built.

Besides policies which built and reformed higher education, there are other policies driven by the trend of globalisation. For instance, Education for All (EFA) aims to broaden global citizens' literacy so that it boosts global market development; the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) put a set of specified international development goals together, which range from halving poverty to halting the spread of AIDS to providing universal primary education by 2015 (Robertson, 2007). Evidently, because of globalisation, there is continual education policy development; nations and international organisations are joining hands in order to build a better education system.

In conclusion, there is already a coherent set of education policy themes and processes at an international level: policy makers are seeking to reshape education systems, furthermore, between global pressures and vernacular education policy responses, there is a globalised education policy field; finally, globalised policy agendas and processes interact with traditions, ideologies, institutions and politics that have developed on national terrains, resulting in local education policy outcomes (Ozga and Lingard, 2007). In order to meet the development of globalisation, transnational agencies produce education outlines and local education systems govern the policies development.

5. GLOBALISATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION POLICIES IN CHINA

Giddens (1990, p.64) captured the interplay between globalisation and local policymaking: as the intensification of worldwide social relationships: globalisation links distant localities and results in local happenings being shaped by events which occur far away. In the meanwhile, local transformation is a part of globalisation as the “lateral extension of social connections across time and space”.

Policies increasingly similar in education systems all around the world because of the process of globalisation: that might be the reason why it is supranational organisations that in the place of policy making. However, different nations have varying capacities and strategies to mediate and ameliorate the effects of global challenges and globalised education policy discourses. Globalisation can revitalise local institutions and formations. Particular societies can be

encouraged to reconstruct the value bases of their organisation and generate energy in production, including in schools, universities and other sites of learning (Lingard & Ozga, 2007). Here, policies in Chinese higher education and their relationship with globalisation would set an example.

With the implementation of the Reform and Open-door Policy, China opened her door to the world in the areas of politics, economy and culture exchanges: more cooperation and competition have been introduced into Chinese society, as well as in education. At the end of last century, the former national vice-chairman of China, Deng Xiaoping suggested that “Education should be geared to the needs of modernisation, the world and the future” in Beijing (cited in Cleverley, 1991, p.268). His remark represents a fundamental change in the concept of education. Since 1998, the Chinese education system is among those which are moving from elite to mass higher education. Under the globalisation process, it is reasonable to make an expansion policy. The Ministry of Education of China (2015) reported there are large numbers of senior specialisd talents for socialist modernisation and they have played an important role in national economic construction, science and technology progress and social development. They meet the needs from the global markets and addresses the challenges in global competitions; the Chinese higher education system has received public funding from the World Bank which leads to more research funding for universities and colleges; more equal education opportunities alleviates social problems so that makes the policy development sustainable.

The trend of globalisation and the emergence of a knowledge economy has set higher demands on higher education. In China, the most prominent challenges that globalisation brings include quality control, information management, universities’ fitness for local community, and the costs and benefits in universities development. All of these problems are sensitive to higher education in values, quality control and regulation (Yang, 2003); the contemporary higher education reform and development in China need to be viewed from the perspectives of global contexts of devolution and marketisation. Therefore, changes are brought about in the policies of expansion, curriculum and internship in the Chinese higher education system. Guided by the international expansion policy made by the OECD, China has reached the initial stage of mass higher education now. Along with the conceptual changes, curricula in institutions of higher education have been rebuilt. In past years, the integration of science and humanities in the curriculum has been popularised to ensure the multi-faceted development of students, so that they have more competitive skills in international markets. In addition, there has been an emphasis on foreign language courses and computer science as compulsory subjects. After entering the WTO, the ability to communicate in one or several foreign languages is emphasised in Chinese universities. Meanwhile, computer skills are beneficial for graduates in finding jobs in international areas. Further, more importance is attached to practical skills’ training, rather than only literacy courses. Yang (2003, p.279) reported that one of reflections of globalisation on higher education employs economic standards as benchmarks; this has led to an international tendency to over-emphasise the practical, technical values of higher

education. To enhance the practical abilities of students, Chinese universities strive to provide better experimental facilities, as well as establish bases for practice in factories and other internships.

Currently, universities in China have already changed administration for students' affairs: the students can plan their learning and are provided with a more flexible curriculum. The rationale of the policy is to train all-round talents. After the prevalence of the market-oriented economy, the Chinese learn from the western education model and they train their youth in a way in which can they combine achieving goals with meeting social needs. To sum up, Chinese universities have already enlarged the scale of enrolment, reformed curriculum and combined literacy education with vocational education; this initially manages the challenges globalisation keeps throwing at them.

6. CONCLUSION

Within this paper, the different understandings of globalisation have been discussed: although no one single conclusion was arrived at, readers can form their own opinions from these different thoughts. Politics, economy and culture have been the main focus of the globalisation tendency; in these areas, education and education policies are implied, how international and national education systems address the challenges and grab the opportunities is a global concern. China, as discussed before, has interacted with globalisation in several aspects over a long period; globalisation has driven the production and development of educational policies in China and the Chinese go all out to confront difficulties and show themselves as set as an example in the global education field even though a few issues need continuous attention.

From the presentation above, there might still be no consensus on whether globalisation is beneficial or detrimental for the process of education policy making and development. In fact, there are always winners and losers in pursuit of progress; the result is in executor's hand. Admittedly, the progress in higher education in China is not without paradox; there are still problems which await further speculation and action, however, the profound influence globalisation brings is in the spotlight and will never be doubted.

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